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SUBJECT: CONCEPT OF POPULAR CONSULTATIONS TAKING SHAPE

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11. (SBU) Summary: On February 7 Poloff met with members of the steering committee for the popular consultations of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, who expressed unity across ethnic and party lines in their goal of taking greater power from the center to benefit their marginalized states. Attendees presented a reasonable timeline for popular consultations, and a fairly clear picture of how popular consultations will be conducted. They also displayed optimism about the process tempered by a grasp of the challenges involved. The vague concept of popular consultations dictated by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) as a means to "ascertain the views of the people" of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile has begun to take shape with the promise of empowering two of Sudan's most marginalized states. If well-managed, and responded to in good faith, popular consultations in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile can serve as an example of how to address Sudan's perennial conflicts, increase stability, and benefit the majority of its people. End Summary.

Timeline for Popular Consultations

12. (SBU) On February 7 Poloff met with members of the steering committee for the popular consultations of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. Attendees explained that the first step toward popular consultations is the impending endorsement of a technical committee for each state by the governor of that state. In the period prior to elections, these technical committees will be charged with conducting a campaign to raise awareness of popular consultations in the two states. The technical committees will also consult candidates for the two states' legislative assemblies respecting their positions on, and commitment to, popular consultations. Concurrently, members of the steering committee will draft a concept paper, describing how popular consultations should be conducted and suggesting questions that should be asked about the CPA during the process. Additional questions are expected to come out of public meetings held during the technical committees' awareness campaign.

13. (SBU) Within two months after elections, each state will form a commission to conduct popular consultations as called for in the Popular Consultations Law. These commissions have three months to conduct the field work of consulting the populations of their respective states regarding their views on the CPA. The commissions will then develop a report based on the information

they received and send it to their respective state legislatures for approval. Attendees acknowledged the challenges presented by the fact that the time for conducting field work falls within Sudan's rainy season, and said that this makes it all the more important to do as much advance work as possible.

¶4. (SBU) Steering committee members in attendance agreed that budgeting for the popular consultations is a state-level responsibility. Attendees noted that both state assemblies have passed estimated budgets for 2010 that include funds to conduct popular consultations. Attendees added they also anticipate international donor assistance.

Who Will be Consulted?

¶5. (SBU) Steering committee members said they expect the process of getting people's views on the CPA to take varied forms, based on what is appropriate for the venue. Thus in a village where

KHARTOUM 00000222 002 OF 003

literacy is limited, a town hall style meeting, in which villagers can come forward and speak about their aspirations may be appropriate. In another context, villagers may be read a list of questions and be asked to express their approval or disapproval by a show of hands. In yet another context, literate individuals may be asked to fill out a questionnaire. Attendees explained that while every person will have the opportunity to respond to all questions, participants need not answer every one.

What Will They Be Asked?

¶6. (SBU) The questions asked will vary based on the issue addressed. For example, on the question of what is an appropriate percentage of oil revenues that the oil producing state should receive, attendees stated that the result could be a simple numerical average of all responses received. Regarding power sharing, attendees agreed that government positions, including ministries, and positions in the civil service, the military, and the national security services, should be allocated on a state by state basis, based on a percentage of each state's population.

¶7. (SBU) Attendees noted the importance of properly recording and representing "the will of the people" as represented by the responses received. To this end, attendees noted that all answers received during popular consultations will be recorded and stored in a data base for reference. Attendees acknowledged, however, that the questions asked will play a major role in shaping the answers received. For example, a question on wealth sharing could address only oil revenues, or it could be much broader, addressing the share of revenues a state should receive for minerals, timber, electrical power, and any other resources extracted from that state. Attendees also noted that the questions asked will be intended to educate participants both as to what they currently receive and how similar issues of sharing between the state and federal level are handled in other countries. Attendees focused on the fact that while Southern Kordofan currently receives two

percent of revenues derived from oil extracted in that state, Indonesia's Aceh province receives a seventy percent share, a result achieved after having undergone a process of consultation and negotiation with Indonesia's central government.

Negotiating the People's Aspirations with the Presidency

18. (SBU) Attendees were a diverse group, with participants including members of the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), Nuba, Misseriya, and Funj ethnic groups, and residents of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. Regardless of ethnicity or party affiliation, attendees saw themselves united in an effort to transfer power from the center to benefit the people of their states. Attendees did disagree slightly on the approach that the two states should take in negotiations with the presidency. One attendee emphasized the need to set realistic expectations and present realistic demands, while another disagreed, stating that the people of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile should be very ambitious and leave it to the central government to be realistic. All attendees agreed that the central government must be "less greedy." They also agreed that they have little faith in the central government. They said this is not going to change regardless of who is elected in April because "the center in Sudan always wishes to centralize power."

19. (SBU) In spite of this mistrust, all attendees expressed optimism about the process and likely outcomes. They noted that

KHARTOUM 00000222 003 OF 003

they look to the UN and members of the international community to support the process and help ensure that the presidency negotiates with the states in good faith. Attendees agreed, however, that if a reasonable compromise cannot be achieved, all options for the future status of the states remain open, including breaking with the north and joining the south. (Note: This option is not included in the CPA. End Note.)

110. (SBU) Comment: The optimism and unity of purpose displayed by attendees across ethnic and party lines are encouraging. Popular consultations may be the CPA's most unambiguously positive process. There are probably few outside of Khartoum's inner circle who will argue that Sudan will not benefit from devolution of power and wealth to its marginalized peripheries. While the state-level elites conducting and overseeing the popular consultations will largely control what questions are asked and how the answers are interpreted, the process still promises to be broadly inclusive and empowering. It is also noteworthy that the attendees look on popular consultations as a means to improve relations with Sudan's center, rather than as a means to independence. If well-managed, and responded to in good faith, popular consultations in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile can serve as an example of how to address Sudan's perennial conflicts, increase stability, and benefit the majority of its people. End Comment.

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